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Testimony of the Aaron Jones, Veterans Outreach, in regards to the following bills before the
Veterans' Affairs Committee February 25, 2014

Good afternoon, Senator Leone, Representative Hennessey and members of the Veterans Affairs Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to come before you and testify in regards to the bills being reviewed for this legislative session.

As the Veterans Outreach Coordinator at the South Park Inn Shelter, and as a combat veteran and former member of the Connecticut Army National Guard, I come in contact with a large number of veterans from a variety of different organizations and groups. Today I am representing the South Park Inn Emergency Shelter and the veteran population that we serve. This population includes 191 homeless veterans that were housed in one of the programs offered at South Park Inn. This also includes the over 700 veterans that have been served since starting the weekly Veterans Drop Inn Center. These numbers reflect veterans living not only in Hartford, but from the greater Hartford area and extending across our state. This is a very diverse population both demographically and culturally, that shares a common experience of military service and veteran status. I am here today to speak on the current bills based on my experiences working with these veterans and listening to their needs, interests, and concerns.

It is our hope at the South Park Inn that these bills will help our homeless veteran population and that we can work together with this committee to further assist not only homeless veterans but veterans in general who may benefit from these laws.

1. S.B. No. 210 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING VETERANS WHO SERVED IN THE NATIONAL GUARD. (VA)

Support – This is an issue which we feel is very important for individuals who have served in the National Guard but did not deploy and are not eligible for Federal Veterans benefits. These men and women volunteered to serve and currently there are only very limited services available to them due to the current definition of veteran status.

2. S.B. No. 211 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE SOLDIERS, SAILORS AND MARINES FUND. (VA)

Oppose – The current language puts control of this fund under the authority of the State Treasurer. We feel that the fund should be administered by the American Legion and that the State should have fiduciary oversight.

3. S.B. No. 212 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY TASK FORCE. (VA)

Support- This will make it much easier for returning veterans to find gainful employment.

4. S.B. No. 213 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE VETERANS' OPPORTUNITIES PILOT PROGRAM. (VA)

Support – We feel that this Bill is vital to meeting the needs of veterans and especially homeless veterans who often tell us that employment is a barrier to them finding permanent housing. Furthermore, the grants that are proposed in this bill would allow agencies like the South Park Inn and others who work specifically with veterans to continue their work and expand employment services to their clients.

5. S.B. No. 214 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A TAX CREDIT FOR DONATIONS OF VEHICLES TO VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS. (VA)

Support – Veterans organizations provide many services to the veteran population and this bill would encourage donations which are essential to these organizations.

6. S.B. No. 215 (RAISED) AN ACT PROVIDING VETERANS' PREFERENCES IN THE RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND HOUSING AUTHORITY PROJECTS. (VA)

Support – We are in support of this bill as affordable housing is another barrier for homeless veterans to find permanent housing.

7. S.B. No. 216 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING VETERANS. (VA)

Support – We feel that a thorough study of the needs of veterans across the state will provide a better understanding of how state and non-profit agencies can work together to ameliorate the dissemination of services.

8. S.B. No. 217 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING EXCUSED ABSENCES FROM SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN OF SERVICE MEMBERS. (VA)

Support – We recognize that deployment can have a drastic impact on a service member's children and that the implementation of this bill may reduce the effects of said deployment as well as improve the readjustment period following deployment.

9. S.B. No. 218 (RAISED) AN ACT CREATING A VETERANS' PROJECTS ACCOUNT. (VA)

Support – We support this bill in that it gives residents a way to donate money to help veterans and support veterans' organizations.

10. H.B. No. 5293 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING STOLEN VALOR. (VA)

Support – We are in support of this bill that clarifies the issue of misrepresentation of military service.

11. H.B. No. 5294 (RAISED) AN ACT MAKING TECHNICAL CHANGES TO THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS STATUTES. (VA)

Support – We support the revisions to this statute.

12. H.B. No. 5297 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A DEDUCTION FROM THE INCOME TAX FOR AMOUNTS RECEIVED AS ACTIVE SERVICE PAY. (VA)

Support – We support the revisions to this statute.

13. H.B. No. 5298 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ACTIVE SERVICE PAY FOR MEMBERS OF THE CONNECTICUT NATIONAL GUARD. (VA)

Support – We support the revisions to this bill and feel that this bill will help deployed service members and their families financially.

14. H.B. No. 5299 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE FINDINGS OF THE MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY TASK FORCE. (VA)

Support – We support this bill in that it removes a possible barrier for employment for service members and their spouses thus reducing the impact of returning to civilian employment post- deployment or after completing their period of service.

We appreciate this opportunity to come before you and testify on these matters. On behalf of the South Park Inn and the veterans we serve, we wish to thank you for your continued support of our service members, veterans, and their families.